

February 22, 2006

Brian Schweitzer  
Governor of Montana  
Montana State Capitol  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, Montana 59602-0801

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

Thank you for taking the time to visit all of the county courthouses, and giving us an opportunity to help address issues, which have such an impact on our local areas. We must start with an apology, for we exceeded the scope of work for which you asked of us. This was required, due to the size of the subject, and also the importance surrounding the directive you had given us. As you are aware one of the most important roles we fill at the commission level is looking out for the public's health, safety, and welfare. This task given us by you required that we look at our county from those perspectives. The economy of our county, and the safety of our residents, and the recreational opportunities of our residents, was in the forefront of our thoughts as we developed this response. There also existed a strong responsibility for us to address the same concerns for the State of Montana, and the United States of America.

The management decisions on these National Forests have impacts that are felt throughout the world. When building material costs go up it impacts every one, for example the rebuilding process in the hurricane impacted states. The pollution from a large catastrophic wildfire even has global impacts, and we needed to look at these also. So again thank you for this opportunity, and please weigh in strongly on allowing these decisions to be made at the local level. With that being said here is the list of things that we feel need to come to the local level, and also our answer to your request for specific new roads required in our county.

1. Historically, none of the National Forest areas in our county were road less. Areas of pristine old growth forests do not exist in large acreages within Jefferson County. We strongly support your contention "that building new roads into back country areas is not what is needed, however utilizing the roads that currently exist for timber harvest, fuel mitigation, fire wood gathering, and all other types of multiple use should be considered as a very high priority. All of the studies that we have seen, including the Beaverhead

Deerlodge National Forest information point to the fact that less than 5%, and as low as 2%, of the people who use these forests do so in road less areas. By shutting out a majority of users, and especially the groups that promote economic development such as timber and mining interests, we increase the cost of maintenance to the only stakeholder left, the United States Forest Service.

Maintenance costs stay in a manageable range when shared by a large pool of users. Revenues from timber sales, fire wood permits, mining permits, off road vehicle licensing fees, Christmas tree permits, personal use post and pole permits, and any other fees generated in a multiple use format all help to offset the cost of maintenance to these roads. Reopening the currently existing roads would help erase all of the current concerns dealing with funding public schools, road maintenance, renewable resource jobs, hunting, fishing, motorized, and non-motorized recreation, construction costs, affordable housing costs, catastrophic fire, and spread of invasives. The issue of invasives must include insect and non native plant species, but also areas of conifer encroachment. There can be no discussion of road needs without these and many more items being considered.

2. There must be a fundamental change in laws so that the Forest Service prescriptions to address the concerns in #1 will have a chance of being implemented in a timely and helpful manner. The current framework of laws has forced the Forest Service to propose policies such as “let it burn up to 2000 acres”. Proposals such as these are detrimental to our county, state, and country. All areas of responsibility by government are laid aside by a” let it burn” policy, and consequently all people suffer. Health and environmental impacts are felt around the world. It has been proven that the pollution from a large wildfire event even has the ability to change the weather patterns of the entire world.

Montana and Jefferson County also suffer economic damage from these policies from lack of timber revenues, which are earmarked for road maintenance, and school funding. The other major industry that suffers after a major fire event is tourism. All studies that we have seen point to the fact that people want to visit our state to DRIVE through our mountains and open spaces, but nobody wants to see a fire devastated landscape. After a major fire event the first plants to return tend to be non-native and noxious weeds. This also hurts our economy. The current framework of laws prohibits useful ways to increase our economies, while creating huge costs to fight fires. The danger of trying to stop a fire that has reached 2000 acres cannot be overstated. The chance of major property damage in Jefferson County would be huge as very few areas could be found which would not be threatened by a 2000 acre fire.

3. The re-opening of currently built roads would help to insure the profitability of our agricultural producers. The grazing allotments that cattle producers utilize are vital to the success of their operations. The fees paid by these producers can also be used to offset road maintenance costs. These producers help the economy of Jefferson County, the State of Montana, and the United States of America. Another huge advantage these producers give to our county and state is the retention of open space. One of the major reasons tourists claim to come to Montana is to DRIVE through our open spaces. The best way to maintain those open spaces is to make sure that our agricultural producers can stay profitable. Grazing allotments also help to reduce fire dangers by getting rid of tons of small kindling materials, which help fires to start and spread.
4. Jefferson County is also very supportive of opening currently existing roads because of the vast mineral and metal resources in the Boulder Batholith. Not all areas of the Forest Service can be managed the same throughout the country. Very few areas of the United States can boast of the riches that lie beneath the ground in Jefferson County. The new technologies and mining practices make extraction of these materials safe, and environmentally friendly, and should be encouraged at all levels of government. We are very supportive of the statement by Governor Schweitzer that he would like to expand the mineral extraction industry in Montana by 50%. This is a great goal, and we see it as attainable right here in Jefferson County. We hope that the Governors' goal is not just based on expansion of the coal extraction industry, but includes all of the resources currently mined in Montana. Copper, zinc, molybdenum, gold, uranium, and other important minerals, and metals, are available in great quantities in Jefferson County, and the extraction of these would greatly help our schools and road maintenance budgets. Again the laws and permitting processes need to be revised so that this industry is welcomed into these areas where roads already exist, but need to be re-opened. Welcoming these types of industries helps all economies from local to global, and it is insane to have such a regulatory climate that we suffer any fear for our local economies.
5. All of these resource management and road decisions need to be made at the local level with local decision making, NOT JUST INPUT! The impacts of management decisions in our county that are not made in our county are neither fair nor helpful. The benefits to the overwhelming majority must be implemented, and cannot come in a boiler plate fashion. While this is true, we also acknowledge that special circumstances exist which require special management techniques. Some do want to utilize back country areas on foot or horseback and there needs to be places for them to do so.

We highly recommend that the areas that have those attributes be preserved when ever possible. This is not the case however in Jefferson County. The resources in our county are ones which are best served through having roads

and good access. All of our areas are best managed locally, so that we can consider the special requirements needed in our areas. These include resource management, motorized, and non-motorized recreation, agriculture, and we also realize that some of our special needs have to deal with physically handicapped people who would be completely excluded from living out their heritage of hunting, fishing, and just enjoying our back country if all of these roads continue to remain closed.

6. That sums up our response to the overall management questions that are raised when roads are talked about. As to your request for any new roads that are needed in Jefferson County our answer is a brief “no new roads needed or wanted”.

Again, we thank you for the chance to be involved in this process, and please fight hard for the right of these decisions to be made at the local level. We are the last best place, and we know best how to retain that atmosphere. Our resource extraction industries and agricultural producers are the ladies that have kept us dancing for all of these years, let us not now leave them on the dance floor to wither and die.

Tomas E Lythgoe, Chair  
Jefferson County Commission

Chuck Notbohm

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